

ESPORTS – GOES BEYOND THE GAME: WHAT FACTORS MOTIVATE ESPORTS SPECTATORSHIP & HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT FROM TRADITIONAL SPORTS

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Summary

Esports – a new form of competition through video games – is rapidly growing in recent years, crowds of viewers gathered in top Esports tournaments while fiercely cheering in the venue, the scene is no inferior to traditional sporting events. It is evident that understanding the customer behavior of Esports spectators is essential to develop effective marketing strategies for the Esports industry. The previous researches have examined the possible motivations for Esports viewership and the comparison to traditional sports. The purpose of this study is to further explore the reasons behind those motivations as well as the logic to explain why the differences in motivations between Esports spectatorship and traditional sports spectatorship exist. The current study employs the qualitative research method to interview 3 groups of Esports viewers, they include: experts, fans and spectators. The result indicates that appreciation of skills and knowledge acquisition are the key motivations for people to consume Esports due to their familiarity and interest towards the game. Moreover, Esports spectators are similar to the fandom of traditional sports in most aspects, but they differ from each other in terms of knowledge acquisition, excitement and vicarious achievement because of the accessibility and novelty of video games, also the different mediums of transmission and dissemination. The current study emphasizes the differences of Esports consumption motive to traditional sports, suggesting that Esports audiences could be better monetized by targeting their unique incentives.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Section 1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The term “Esports” is no longer an unacquainted word in nowadays, indeed, this new type of competition through video games receives increasingly attention in current times (Reitman et al., 2020). On top of that, many mainstream media start to recognize Esports as a branch of sports (Funk, Pizzo, & Baker, 2018). This might fit with the definition provided by Hamari & Sjöblom (2017), they define that “*eSports is as a form of sports where the primary aspects of the sport are facilitated by electronic systems; the input of players and teams as well as the output of the eSports system are mediated by human-computer interfaces.*” Furthermore, International e-sports Federation (2021) also classify Esports as a sport by describing “*Esports (Electronic Sports) is a competitive sport where gamers use their physical and mental abilities to compete in various games in a virtual, electronic environment*”. Though there are dissenters such as Burton et al. (2021) and Parry (2018), who believe that Esports is not qualified to be counted as a form of sport in terms of direct physicality, human enterprise and normativity, the quick emergence of numerous national and global Esports governing bodies to regulate and institutionalize the industry definitely proves the massive influence which Esports has brought into today’s world (Seo, 2013).

It is undeniable that the Esports industry has witnessed an exponential growth during past few years and it still looks promising henceforward. According to Newzoo (2021), in terms of market size, Esports achieved \$947 million in 2020 and it is predicted to surpass the bar of one billion in 2021 with a 14.5% year-on-year growth rate. In addition, based on this report, the market size is forecasted to grow at a 11.1% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) to reach 1.62 billion in 2024. Despite that the economic size of Esports is still not comparable with games market, the potentiality of Esports has been showed very clear as the CAGR of Esports between 2019 to 2024 exceeds Games’ by 3.9%.

Besides, the viewership of Esports is another proof which indicates its global influences. Newzoo (2021) reports that in 2020, global Esports audience reached 435.9 million and it will

increase 8.7% year on year to hit 474 million in 2021, the number is projected to exceed 577 million in 2024 with a CAGR of 7.7%. Again, this figure seems not to be so auspicious compared to some top level well-known traditional sports such as soccer (4 billion viewers globally in 2020) and tennis (1 billion viewers globally in 2020), but it is definitely expanding well enough to be seen as a threat to these traditional sports (Jones, 2019). For example, the cumulative viewership of League of Legend (the biggest Esports title currently) in 2017 finals is around 58 million which tops many acknowledged U.S. sports leagues like MLB (38 million) and NBA (32 million) but NFL (124 million).

The economic aspects of Esports such as market size, viewership and audience have an essential influence on the development of this study. Based on these analytical data, the researchers believe that there are many meaningful data which could be extracted from Esports spectators in terms of their fandom of Esports, motivations to watch Esports, further the consumer behaviors of Esports (Anderson, 2019). For the reason that Esports is a briskly evolving industry, it is important to have a better understanding of predictive potentials of fandom and driving factors on the consumer behavior in order to support game developers as well as Esports leagues who are pillars in the Esports ecosystem on the one hand, and Esports organizations like teams and marketers who will likely conduct promotions and commercials in Esports area on the other.

Section 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The focus of this study lies on the motivations of Esports spectatorship and comparison with traditional sports. There is a certain number of studies which already discussed about the incentives of Esports viewership and contrast with motives of consuming traditional sports. Therefore, the objective of this research is to:

1. Further excavate the motivations of Esports spectatorship by exploring the reasons behind those incentives.
2. Investigate the similarities as well as differences between motives of watching Esports and traditional sports, further explore why those disparities in motivations exist.

This research is designed to extend and delve on the developing body of Esports academic literature. Even though Esports industry is growing rapidly in recent years, there is still a limited number of academic research on Esports customers. It is understandable that the sparseness of such studies could be attributed to the relative novelty of the Esports industry, however more research opportunities in Esports area are projected to arise as the industry continues to grow. This thesis aims to provide a deeper insight on understanding spectator motives of Esports, which leads to a more comprehensive knowledge on consumer behaviors in the realm of Esports.

Section 3. RESEARCH FLOW

The rest of this paper is structured as below. The introduction is followed by Chapter 2, which presents an in-depth look of Esports, in Chapter 2, this study will introduce the history of Esports and its ecosystem. Next, Chapter 3 reviews the existing literatures on motives of Esports spectatorship alongside with the comparison to traditional sports. Chapter 4 is the explanation of methodology that is employed in this research, followed by Chapter 5, where the results be analyzed and discussed. Finally, Chapter 6 ends the paper with the conclusion, limitation and future direction of this study.

CHAPTER 2. INDEPTH LOOK OF ESPORTS

Section 1. THE HISTORY OF ESPORTS

2.1.1. Esports in early years

The origin of competitive gaming is greatly intertwined with the ancestor of video games and can be traced back to 1940s, when the game *Nim* was introduced to the public (Scholz, 2019). At that time, *Nim* already had the element of competitive gaming as it was designed for two people to compete against each other. According to Flesch (1951), in 1940, the display of *Nim* at the New York World's Fair Westinghouse received a huge response, but there was no business interested in entering this untapped market because *Nim* was lack of entertainment purposes and perceived as merely a demonstration of the technology possibilities. Therefore, Scholz (2019) claims that *Tennis for Two* from William Higinbotham in 1958 can be seen as the starting point for modern video game industry since its pure entertainment purposes, for instance, the public spectacle was possible for *Tennis for Two* as the element of spectatorship was considered and included in the game design from the beginning, so that viewers could follow the matchup between two players. Kalning (2008) reports that there were certain groups of people already watching others play such video games at that moment, but the scale was limited because based on a business perspective, the industry was hard to commercialize as computers were expensive back then.

Figure 1: *Tennis for two*



Source: Tennis for Two - Wikipedia, 2021

2.1.2. Pioneering Esports

As a result of technology development in 1990s, the appearance of personal computer and its affordability helped the industry to grow in a fast pace (Scholz, 2019). For example, the births of PlayStation, Game Boy and Xbox later on proves that video games were becoming more approachable to the general public. Although it created a firm base for the development of Esports in the future, Griffiths et al. (2011) states that the main contributor of the significant boost in competitive gaming during that period of time was an evolutionary Internet technology which is local area network (LAN), the advancement of LAN technology now allowed people to play with or compete against other human beings instead of machine, which is marked as the turning point in the Esports history. Benefited by LAN, from late 1990s to late 2000s, the Esports industry experienced a steady growth with the emergence and expansion of tournaments plus media exposures, such as one of the first Esports tournaments named Red Annihilation in 1997, French Electronic Sports World Cup in 2002 and World Cyber Games (WCG) in 2008 (Lee and Schoenstedt, 2011). Moreover, on the grounds that increasing number of tournaments and events been hold, professionalization started to emerge in the Esports industry during this era. Take SK Gaming for example, in 2003, they were the first non-Korean organization to enter a formal contract with one of their players - Ola 'elemeNt' Moum (Syrota, 2011). In the same year, one European online computer hardware seller called Alternate founded their own corporate Esports team, ALTERNATE aTTaX (Alternate, 2012). All these milestones showed the progress of Esports organizations building their business models further moving towards a legitimate business unit then.

2.1.3. The modern days of Esports

Nonetheless, the growth of the Esports industry is not always plain sailing, due to the impact of financial crisis and its sponsor-driven feature in early times, everything was shrunk (Messier, 2011). For instance, the withdraw of some crucial sponsors like Nvidia resulted that the prize poll of WCG 2010 decreased to \$250,000, only a half compared to 2009. Scholz (2019) believes that the financial crisis caused a mindset shift in Esports practitioners, specifically, from relying on sponsorships to building a steady audience base through making games more accessible, entertaining,

and watchable. Based on this idea, Esports managed to stage a comeback in 2010s through a successful transformation to a more sustainable business model that was now focused on the audience. This triumph could be credited by two factors, firstly, the debut of two game titles which gained their global popularity rapidly - *StarCraft II* and *League of Legend*. Secondly, the arrival of live streaming platform like Twitch supported Esports organizations to easily reach their audience and create a solid revenue stream (Scholz, 2019).

Even to this day, more and more businesses from outside are interested and trying to enter this market, which shapes the Esports ecosystem continuously. Because of that, Jin (2010) claims that Esports is a highly dynamic industry and will keep evolving overtime. It might be too early to give a final conclusion on how does Esports look like, yet it is essential to have a closer look at its ecosystem which connects different stakeholders in the Esports scene, so that the similarities and differences between the Esports industry and the traditional sports industry could be explored in a business perspective.

Section 2. THE ECOSYSTEM OF ESPORTS

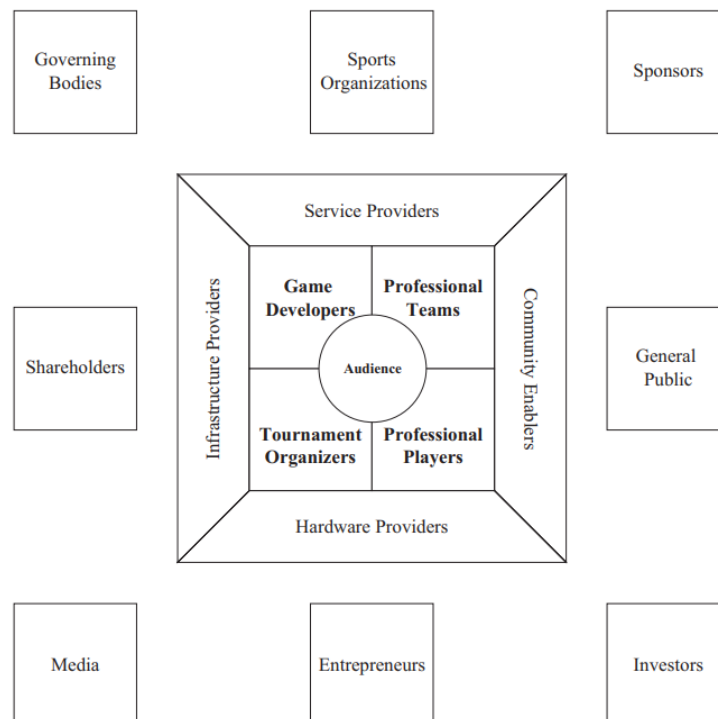
2.2.1. Stakeholders in the Esports industry

In order to understand the behavior of stakeholders, the stakeholder overview is essential, especially in a highly volatile industry like Esports (Brugha & Varvasovszky, 2000). Freeman (1984) defines the stakeholder as “*any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives*”. And it is becoming conspicuous that Esports is a complicated and highly interlacing industry, which means that many parties in this business depend on each other. For instance, there would be no Esports tournaments if there is no game title; if there is no tournament, none of Esports teams would exist; without teams, no audience that can cheer – and no audience means no business could be developed.

Stakeholders in the Esports industry can be categorized into two groups: primary stakeholders and secondary stakeholders (Scholz, 2019). Primary stakeholders refer to those who directly impact the value chain and further interact with other internal stakeholders, while secondary

stakeholders can be described as peripheral or environmental stakeholders who have an indirect effect on the industry (Darnall et al., 2010). In Esports, primary stakeholders include audience, game developers, professional teams, tournament organizers, professional players plus providers and communities. All of these actors are linked in the value chain network in a certain degree and try to monetize the key stakeholder – audience, according to the Porter’s (1985) value chain framework, primary stakeholders in Esports can be further separated based on the business they operate. For instance, game developers, professional teams, tournament organizers and professional players are more important for the Esports industry since their primary roles, whilst service, infrastructure, and hardware providers together with communities are support activities. On the other hand, secondary stakeholders include governing bodies, sports organizations, sponsors, general public, investors, entrepreneurs, media and shareholders. In spite of their indirect contribution to the value chain, they still significantly influence the Esports industry over investment or pressure for the change towards a particular purpose (Finch et al., 2019).

Figure 2: Stakeholder layout in the Esports industry



Source: Scholz, 2019

2.2.2. The business model network in Esports world

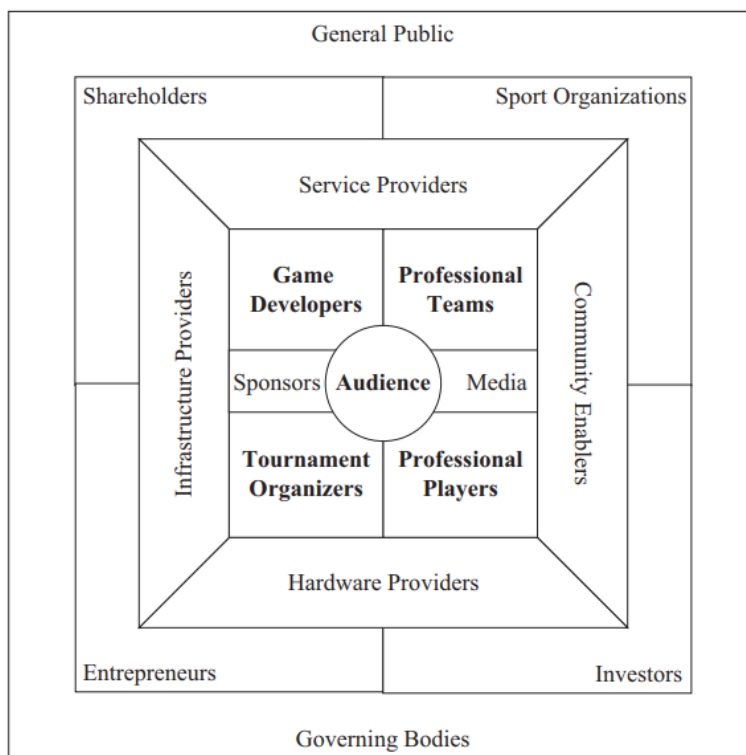
As mentioned above, various stakeholders in the Esports industry interweave with each other, they need each other to survive and to succeed. This increasing interconnection between different parties leads to a tight business model network in the Esports industry, instead of solely focusing on value creation by oneself, Esports stakeholders tend to attach more importance to the development of Esports as a whole, which results a value integration between different parties and subsequently leads a higher profitability throughout the entire system.

Scholz (2019) states that this unique network system can be explained by a 3 Cs rule – Coopetition (cooperation + competition), Co-destiny and Convergence. Of course, same as most industries, competitions from both new entries and existing players are commonly seen in the Esports business, but at the same time, the feature of interweaving facilitates different practitioners in the industry to exploit the synergy for cooperation, so that both parties could benefit from an improved overall network system. Brenda (2017) asserts that coopetition is extremely crucial for Esports because it drives innovation while fostering the growth of Esports market, for example, the Korean video game company Bluehole amazed the world in 2017 by the release of *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (PUBG), the game has sold over 70 million copies in total as of 2020 and opened a new era for battle royale games. Other competitors smelled the opportunity and introduced their own version of games by adapting the same concept – battle royale, such examples include *Fortnite* by Epic Games and *Apex Legends* by Respawn Entertainment. Though all these game developers compete against each other fiercely to grab more players, they lifted a fervor of battle royale games and benefit the whole Esports industry, because they absorbed the advantages from other competitors' game and made their own a better product, in result more people want to play the game, which means a larger number of potential viewers for the tournament.

As competitors started to cooperate time to time, Scholz (2019) claims that there is a shared vision could be discovered by both parties, which is Co-density. This phenomenon can be easily found among long-term stakeholders in the Esports industry as they all want Esports to grow. On the basis of Coopetition and Co-density, a certain convergence of values toward the audience appears,

which leads to one combined business model network.

Figure 3: The Esports stakeholder network under continuing evolution, emphasizing the significance of one united business model network



Source: Scholz, 2019

2.2.3. Audience as the common objective for value creation

It is undeniable that the core of all stakeholders is the audience, and all other actors in this industry are scrambling to monetize the audience. Nonetheless, due to the fact that Esports is a such dynamic and interwoven industry, distinct boundaries between different stakeholders are becoming blurred, which results that audiences in the Esports industry are passionately participating (Taylor, 2012). For example, being an Esports audience could also mean being a member of the professional team, meanwhile, the audience could also be a part of media like streamers to create contents for others.

Though Jonasson and Thiborg (2015) concludes that Esports viewers are aligned with the culture of gamers since their same medium, Scott (2019) points out that Esports audiences

differentiate themselves from merely gamers through the competitiveness that they have enjoyed. It is evident that the Esports audience is a unique group of consumers which has many characteristics. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the motives of Esports spectatorship so that other stakeholders could develop a more efficient strategy to monetize the Esports audience.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Section 1. DEFINING ESPORTS

There are many definitions regarding to Esports, but the consistent idea across most academics is that Esports is defined as a form of competitive gaming by using video games, most often conducted in the context of organized tournaments (Jenny et al., 2017; Pizzo et al., 2018). It is also important to notice that Esports do not restrict themselves into one single platform, they encompass an array of terraces, from game consoles to personal computers, even virtual reality (VR) devices in these days. Moreover, the genres of Esports are very diversified, they include, but are not limited to: multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), first-person shooter (FPS), real-time strategy (RTS), sports-themed, battle royale that is very popular recently and such.

The dispute lies on whether Esports should be counted as a sport, in 2006, Wagner (2006) argues that it is too narrow to merely define Esports as a way of playing video games competitively in the format of professional settings. Instead, Wagner (2006) proposes that Esports should be defined as “*An area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies*”. Similarly, Hamari & Sjöblom (2017), Kane & Spradley (2017) as well as Jonasson & Thiborg (2010) also categorize Esports as a sport since its physical exertion, skill requirement, competitiveness and rivalry. On top of that, Esports has been named as a full medal sports event for the Asian Games in 2022 (The Japan Times, 2020). All these statements suggest that Esports is gradually being perceived as a form of sports by many, but there are other opinions which challenge the idea. For instance, Parry (2018) believes that Esports is not a sport because it is not an adequate human enterprise, it lacks direct physicality as well as whole-body control & skill, no contribution to the development of the whole human nor appropriate regulation system.

Figure 4: The typical situation of athletes in an Esports event



Source: Fitch, 2020

To sum up, though there are still debates about whether Esports belongs to sports, it is incontestable that Esports does share a lot of similarities with traditional sports (Jenny et al., 2017). On account of this finding, the thesis believes that the motives of consuming traditional sports might provide a relevant insight into the motives of Esports spectatorship, further can be a valuable comparison on how these incentives parallel with or differ from each other.

Section 2. MOTIVATIONS FOR SPORT CONSUMPTION

In order to comprehend sport consumer behaviors, identification of salient incentives to sport consumption is necessary. So, the work of Hebb (1955) and Deci (1971) have been largely used to build on the research. Hebb (1955) interprets the motivation as the process that energize and direct purposeful behavior, Deci (1971) further supplements that motives have a positive relation to encourage behaviors since the enjoyment generated by the activities. Snelgrove et al. (2008) admit

that in sport-related research, motivation is the most heavily studied concept because most behaviors of sport viewer fulfill their psychological needs. As for marketers in the sport industry, this topic is equally crucial because by understanding the diverse reasons for sport viewership, the event attendance could be improved through correctly approaching the desires of sport spectators.

3.2.1. Inchoate sport motivation measurement frameworks

Wann (1995) claims that the motives of sport consumption contain manifold factors, accordingly, many different frameworks have been used to examine these incentives such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, push-pull factors, self-determination theory and such. In 2001, Funk and James (2001) introduces the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) which provides a systematic view on the study of sport spectators. The model offers a scheme which explains the individual's involvement in sport consumptions, four levels have been described: awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance. The PCM also proposes that complicity and intensification of sport-related mental associations are the key to connect one individual with a sports team. This model has served as a basis for subsequent research on sport customer behaviors to disclose the incentives of sport viewership. Trail and Kim (2011) confirm that such study on sport spectator motivations is valuable in understanding behaviors of sport consumption, furthermore, these motives have been identified as the pivotal predictors for sport consumption decisions.

Early frameworks exist to measure sport customer motivations are the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) by Wann (1995) and the Motivations of the Sport Consumer (MSC; Milne & McDonald, 1999). In Wann's (1995) study, he employs the questionnaire packet to survey 272 subjects, most of them are university students. Some representative survey questions are: *"One the main reasons that I watch, read, and/or discuss sports is that I get pumped up when I am watching my favorite teams"*, *"I like to watch, ready, and/or discuss sports because doing so gives me an opportunity to be with my family"* and so on. As a result, 8 factors are found to be associated with sport fandom, they consist of: (1) eustress, (2) self-esteem, (3) escape, (4) entertainment, (5) economic, (6) aesthetic, (7) group affiliation, (8) family needs. The SFMS has been proved to be valid and dependable across various sport cultures and contexts (Wann and James, 2019).

3.2.2. An improvement on previous models and research

In contrast, Trail and James (2001) argues that the previous studies like the SFMS and the MSC offer limited reliability and validity in terms of content, criterion, and construct. So, they present their refined version of model to measure the motives behind sport viewer consumption behavior, which is the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC). In their study, Trail and James (2001) also employ the questionnaire survey as the research method, but they differentiate themselves from Wann (1995) and Milne & McDonald (1999) by selecting 275 season ticket holders for a major league baseball team as their objectives to ensure the MSSC's validity. In the MSSC, some typical questions include: "*The main reason that I watch is because I find players attractive*", "*Interacting with other fans is a very important part of being at games*" and so forth. The result of MSSC conceptualizes 9 incentives behind why people watch or consume sport, some of these scales share identical characteristics with Wann's (1995) model: (1) achievement, (2) acquisition of knowledge, (3) aesthetics, (4) drama, (5) escape, (6) family, (7) physical attraction, (8) physical skill, (9) social interaction.

All in all, before Wann (1995), there was relatively a little amount of empirical research in discovering the motivations behind sport spectatorship, while Wann (1995) pioneered in this area with the creation of the SFMS to summarize the incentives in an experimental fashion, Trail and James (2001) further added on the literature by emphasizing long-term psychological motivations for sport viewership. Nowadays, both the SFMS and the MSSC are widely adopted in the study of sport customer behavior.

Section 3. MOTIVATIONS FOR ESPORTS CONSUMPTION

According to the PWC's (2016) report, Esports viewers are similar with traditional sport spectators in the aspect of motivations for watching or following the content. For example, neither esports viewers nor traditional sport spectators want to miss the big game, on top of that, Esports viewers also physically attend the live event to experience the stimulating contest where they can watch the best players' performance in action. In the report (PWC, 2016), several factors have been

discovered on why people watch Esports like competition for male and social interaction for female, these incentives are conceptually identical with the scales proposed by the SFMS and the MSSC. Therefore, it is becoming clear that the analogue relationship between motivations of consuming traditional sports and Esports does exist, meanwhile it is also noticeable that there are definitely some disparities between the incentives of two groups.

3.3.1. Early research on the motivation of Esports spectatorship

Though the study on esports consumption behavior is still relatively limited, some researchers already set their foot in this domain. Early researchers like Weiss & Schiele (2013) employ Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to reveal that both competitiveness and hedonic gratifications like escapism are the main motivators to drive continuous Esports use. In 2017, Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) offer a comprehensive review on customer behavior of Esports spectators by investigating why do people watch Esports on the internet. The instruments they used in the study is a modified version of the MSSC alongside with a dependent variable to identify the frequency of watching Esports contents. The online survey is used and distributed to a variety of global internet channels which are Esports or game related such as Reddit, Twitter, Facebook and subgroups of forum. A total of 888 usable surveys are amassed, through analyzing these responses, Hamari & Sjöblom (2017) declare that escaping everyday routine, acquiring knowledge from Esports, novelty and the enjoyment of aggression are positive and statistically significant in relation to the frequency of consuming Esports contents online. There are some interesting findings showed by the research, for example, the result demonstrates that the enjoyment of aesthetics involved in Esports contexts has a negative correlation with the frequency in watching Esports. Also, contrary to previous qualitative observations, drama seems not to be significant enough to associated with Esports viewing frequency. Lastly, Hamari and Sjöblom (2017) conclude that perceived played skill has slight positive correlation associated with the frequency, but it is small and statistically insignificant.

The work of Hamari & Sjöblom (2017) is fruitful and establishes a firm base for the future study on consumption motives of Esports, however, it must be mentioned that they recognize

Esports as a singular activity or concept in their study (Anderson, 2019). In other words, they do not distinguish the differences between various Esports titles in their online surveys and acquiescently believe that the motives of spectating one specific Esports title are universal across all games and genres, such misperception might disturb the applicability of the findings.

3.3.2. Recent studies on Esports viewership motivations

Since Hamari & Sjöblom's study is isolated from traditional sports, it overlooks the opportunities to explore shared incentives between Esports and traditional sports viewership (Pizzo et al., 2018). In another research of motivations for Esports spectatorship presented by Pizzo et al. (2018), they aim to compare those consumption motives from two different parities. Both scales from the MSSC and the Sport Interest Inventory (SII) are incorporated into their survey questions to obtain data on spectator motivations, and a total of 517 completed questionnaires are received. In order to improve on the Hamari and Sjöblom's (2017) work and take into account the distinctive set of motives from different game titles, Pizzo et al. (2018) divide their data collection into three contexts: a traditional sport event (soccer), a sports-themed Esports title (*FIFA Online 3*) and a popular RTS Esports event (*StarCraft II*). Based on the result, Pizzo and colleagues (2018) summarize that 11 out of 15 motives share similar patterns across the three contexts, they include: (1) interest in sport, (2) interest in player, (3) aesthetics, (4) social opportunities, (5) drama, (6) role model, (7) entertainment value, (8) wholesome environment, (9) acquisition of knowledge, (10) skill of the athletes, (11) enjoyment of aggression. They also discover that there are significant disparities in other areas between these three contexts such as (1) vicarious achievement, (2) excitement, (3) physical attractiveness and (4) family bonding.

In addition, Pizzo et al. (2018) further contribute to the literature through the measurement of the relationship between game attendance frequency and the MSSC or SII. They conclude that in a traditional sport context, interest in sport and player, wholesome environment as well as drama are significant predictors for the frequency of game attendance. On the other side, interest in Esports & player, excitement, role model, enjoyment of aggression, vicarious achievement, entertainment values, family bonding and skill of the athletes are deduced as significant factors in the Esports

scene (or at least in sports-themed and RTS Esports contexts) to predict game attendance frequency.

In a more recent research conducted by Cushen & Rife & Wann (2019), they employ the Sport Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ), SFMS and the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) to examine the differing degrees of motivations between Esports fans and traditional sports fans. Despite that there are no particular Esports titles or traditional sports events specified in their observations, the results are found to be similar with the previous studies. Cushen et al. (2019) state that incentives of Esports fandom highly resemble the motivational factors of traditional sports fandom in most dimensions such as escapism, self-esteem, and group affiliation. On the other hand, they are differentiated in the aspects of entertainment value, learning and family bonding. The findings of Cushen et al. (2019) and Pizzo et al. (2018) are consistent with the conclusion of Brown et al. (2018) who suggest that Esports fans seek out the contents in a manner that complement without totally mirroring the fandom of traditional sports.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

Section 1. DATA COLLECTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore the reasons behind motivations for Esports spectatorship, on top of that, the thesis also aims to compare Esports with traditional sports to seek how they are similar or differ from each other and why those differences occurred. The thesis believes that a qualitative research method would suit this study better not only because there are several studies already existed to quantitatively examine the motivations of consuming Esports, but also it provides an in-depth comprehension of words, opinions and experiences rather than single numerics, which is aligned with the objectives of the thesis. Among various qualitative research method, the semi-structured interview is employed. A semi-structured interview consists of both closed- as well as open-ended questions and often accompanied by follow-up questions such as how and why. Adams (2015) proposes that the semi-structured interview is extremely valuable in a number tasks because it allows interviewers to guide and keep orientation during the process in order to make sure that important topics are covered, meanwhile the flexibility of it fosters a greater understanding of the subject through open-ended question, brain storming and in-depth discussion.

Section 2. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 9 interviewees are assembled in this research, the majority (8 out of 9) of respondents are come from Asian countries, mostly China (3 interviewees) and Japan (3 interviewees), the remaining respondents include 1 from the United States, 1 from Brunei and 1 from Indonesia. Due to the fact that respondents share different culture backgrounds, Mandarin Chinese, English and Japanese are employed to conduct the interview. While the number of male is dominant among participants (7 out of 9), the age group can be split on the line of 30 years old, 6 interviewees are in the group of 23 – 29 years old, the remaining 3 interviewees are at least 30 years old or above. With respect to the education level, nearly all respondents (8 out of 9) have received their undergraduate degrees.

Most importantly, all interviewees have a relationship with Esports in a degree as well as experience in watching Esports contents. On behalf of minimizing the bias from one certain group and maximizing the value of different explanations, the thesis divides 9 interviewees into 3 groups (3 respondents per group) based on their familiarity to Esports as shown below:

1. Experts – People who are very knowledgeable about the area of Esports, they often have rich experience regarding to Esports by working in the industry for a long period of time.
2. Fans – People who enjoy Esports very much, they usually watch Esports contests on a frequent basis due to a high enthusiasm.
3. Spectators – People who watch Esports casually, though their level of engagement relating to Esports is not as high as fans’, they do follow Esports contents time to time.

Table 1: Summary on the information of interviews

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Profession	Affiliation
Akihito Furusawa	Male	41	Japan	CEO	Expert
Takeshi Araki	Male	39	Japan	Assistant CEO	Expert
Shoehi Taguchi	Male	29	Japan	Commentator	Expert
Wang Jingyi	Female	23	China	Graduate Student	Fan
Jonathan Carter Frevola	Male	25	U.S.	Graduate Student	Fan
Ma Li	Male	23	China	Undergraduate Student	Fan
Joshua Tandri	Male	23	Indonesia	Graduate Student	Spectator
Liao Jia	Female	28	China	Graduate Student	Spectator
Vincent Yap Kah Jiun	Male	34	Brunei	Graduate Student	Spectator

Source: Author

Section 3. INTERVIEW QUESTION DESIGN

The content of the interview can be approximately segregated into three major sections. The interview starts with an acknowledgement of the research topics and a self-introduction of the interviewee. In the self-introduction, interviewees' connection and relatedness to Esports are asked, the levels of familiarity as well as engagement towards Esports are also assessed. Following the introduction is Section 1 which aims to investigate respondents' opinions in regard to Esports in a bigger scale such as the growing global market size and its ecosystem across different countries. In Section 2, the interview targets to identify the reasons why respondents watch Esports and do these motivations vary by countries. Section 3 is designed to seek similarities and differences between the spectatorship of Esports and traditional sports, furthermore, interviewees' reasoning on why those disparities in motivations are inquired. The interview ends up with the question that whether respondents believe Esports is a sport and why do they think so. There are 7 questions in total involved in this interview while one interview lasts for around an hour, these interviews are conducted through both online and offline. The specific questions of this interview are listed as below:

■ Section 1: Esports overview

1. *As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?*
2. *How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one from other countries?*

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. *What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?*
4. *Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?*

■ Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports

5. *Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the similarities and differences are?*

6. *What do you think the reasons behind those differences?*

7. *Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?*

CHAPTER 5. RESULT

Section 1. INTERVIEW WITH EXPERT

5.1.1. Akihito Furusawa, 41, Male, Japan

■ *Self-Introduction & How do you related to Esports?*

I have been in touch with Esports since 2013, I was the head of marketing for Logitech in gaming department, I was mainly responsible to promote hardware like mouse and keyboard to Esports viewers. In 2016, I left Logitech and made my own company called RIZeST which mainly organizes and facilitates Esports tournaments in Japan. In 2021, my company had a joint venture, now it is called Wellplayed Rizest.

■ Section 1: Esports overview

1. As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?

I believe there are 3 reasons behind that. First of all, Esports is derived from modern technology, there is not many restrictions for you to watch Esports. You can watch it everywhere, on your tablets, on your computers, on your smart phones, you can enjoy Esports as long as your devices are connected to the Internet. On top of that, Esports is basically free to watch, you do not have to pay a subscription for that, so I would say that the entry barrier for Esports is almost none and Esports is feasible to everyone due to its technology reliance.

The second reason is also related to the technology, I see the increasing number of online communities is also important for growing Esports. Players get together to enjoy the contest as a whole, which makes watching Esports more interesting as their social needs being satisfied. The expanding community increases not only the attachment of existing Esports spectators, but also helps to attract more incomers.

The last reason I would name is the changing perception towards video games. The stereotype is continuously diminishing because the new generation has grown up with video games, they see competitive gaming in a different perspective compared to their parents, I think this is also

credited to recent media exposure and rise of Internet-based companies. In result, people at present are more open to welcome Esports.

2. How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one from other countries?

The major disparity that I noticed is that in Japan, Esports market is still under developing and weaker than other countries like U.S., China and Korea. This weakness can be reflected by the Esports broadcasting rights in Japan, it is not well sold in Japan, the amount of money TV stations or other media platforms willing to pay for the rights is not comparable with other major countries, and so is the size of sponsorships. I believe the reason is that the quantity of Esports spectators is still small for these companies to make a good margin. Japan does have a deep and rich culture in video games, but not in Esports because the gaming culture here is more inclined to console games such as Nintendo Switch and Play Station instead of personal computers. I guess that is why Esports have a relatively slow development speed in Japan.

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?

It will be the drama that motivates me to watch Esports. I like to know the stories behind players and teams, for example, if two teams head into the final, I would like to know their journeys along the way, how they formed up, how they overcome difficulties, what happened to these players outside the field, the underdog challenges the throne and the pride of defending the championship. All these episodes are fascinating to me.

Another reason is that I appreciate the super plays by professional players. When I watched those plays, I always ask myself “How could they do that?!” “Why are they so good at this game?!”, some of these outplays are pure art for me. In a Multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game, there are usually different roles for players such as tanks, healers and damage dealers. Some top Esports players could really master a certain role to a height that goes beyond people’s imagination, so watching them playing against each other in a highest level is just beautiful for me.

4. Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?

In terms of drama and appreciation of skills, I would say that these motivations are the same across different countries. I do not see any differences in these motives, no matter where are you from, as long as you know the game, you will be amazed by Esports pro-players' efforts and their skills. However, I need to mention that the degree of those motivation is very subjective, somebody may value the drama more and someone else might do less, but these motivations definitely exist in every country.

■ Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports

5. Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the similarities and differences are?

Similar with what I said above, I believe that compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, drama and appreciation of players' skill as well as interest in the sport or game are the common incentives. For instance, you can acquire more enjoyment from watching them if you more knowledge towards the game, the player and the team.

Speaking to differences, I believe the motivations for people watching Esports are more diverse than traditional sports. More specifically, at least in Japan, Esports viewers have less incentives to focus on the outcome of competitions, that is to say, Japanese Esports spectators care less about win or lose, they care more about players' personality, entertainment value and so on. Meanwhile, I can see that such competitiveness is highly valued in traditional sports contexts like soccer and basketball. I am not claiming that Esports viewers do not want their home team to win, it would be better if they win, but if they do not win, that is also fine. However, in many traditional sports, these athletes may always face a lot of criticism after they lose.

6. What do you think the reasons behind those differences?

I believe that the reason is the difference on value regarding to win or lose, obviously Japanese Esports viewers have a lower priority on this matter. In Japanese culture, we have an ideology of "Wa" which means peace, competition is not heavily promoted in Japanese societies as well as in our education system, on the contrary, collaboration and teamwork are more emphasized. For instance, some schools in Japan do not reveal the rank of students' scores in the test because it

might hurt the feelings of some kids at lower ranks.

Besides the culture effect, I think the patriotism in Japan is relatively weaker compared to other major countries, I notice that many Japanese say that it is lucky to be born as a Japanese because it is a safe and developed place to live, but not lots of people say that it is proud to be a Japanese, I assume that some historical factors might be involved like World War II. Overall, I think the unique Japanese culture and low attachment to the country cause the less attention on the competitiveness for Esports viewers in Japan.

7. Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?

Yes. I believe the sport is form of competition, since Esports is a competition by using video games, so it should be called as a sport.

5.1.2. Takeshi Araki, 39, Male, Japan

■ ***Self-Introduction & How do you related to Esports?***

I am currently working as an assistant CEO & head of future design department for Rohto pharmaceutical corporation. Rohto started to sponsor Esports players in 2018 and Esports tournaments in 2019. In the same year, Rohto collaborated with Digital Hearts to assist the health of Esports professional players. Overall, I get in touch with Esports with more than 3 years.

■ **Section 1: Esports overview**

1. As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?

The first reason that comes into my mind is the generation. When I was young, a lot of people around me play video games, those kids who good at video games are really popular at school, and I think more and more people grow up with video games. In consequence, the current generation has a more open mind to accept Esports.

The second reason that I believe is the nature of Esports. Esports is all inclusive, it has nothing to do with your gender, age, skill or physical body, you can freely enjoy playing Esports games and watching them. The low entry barrier of Esports makes it more approachable to everyone, which leads to a huge potential customer base.

Lastly, if you mention about recent two years, I might say that the pandemic plays a role for the growth of Esports. Due to people that need to quarantine at home, there are more people choose to play video games since there are not many other options. So, it helps to increase Esports viewership in some degree.

2. How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one from other countries?

I think they are mostly the same in many areas such as tournament organization, league development and team management. However, in terms of market size, Japan is still relatively small than other major countries, it is still at the beginning of course. The possible reasons include less

government promotion and different gaming cultures. It is evident that players in Japan like to play console games instead of PC games, so when the tide of Esports landed in Japan, the response from players is not substantial. Together with the lack of government support, I think the number of Esports viewer in Japan is under developing.

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. *What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?*

For me, the biggest reason is nostalgia. I used to play *Street Fight* a lot when I was in school, but right now, I need to work, I need to take care of my child so I do not have time anymore to play it. Instead, I tend to watch the professional competition of *Street Fighter*, I like to watch it because it reminds the time when I was playing this game, watching Esports gives me a chance to escape my daily routine and entertain myself.

The next motivation for me to watch Esports is the appreciation of players' skill. Since I am familiar with *Street Fighter*, I understand the difficulty of the outplays by those pro-players. It is hard to explain this to somebody who is totally new to *Street Fighter*, but if you look at their moves, their skills and their timing to counter enemy's attack, all these plays require exquisite handling and bold mindset. Therefore, as a player of *Street Fighter*, I can see the beauty of the skills presented by pro-players and I am always excited when such outplays happened.

4. *Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?*

I would say these motivations are the same all over the world. The people who watch Esports mostly are gamers, or they are familiar with the game to a certain degree. So, despite that you may from different countries, you all understand the mechanism of the game, which is the biggest similarity in the gamer community. That is to say, if there is a super play such as Faker's Zed outplay in *League of Legends*, you and I will both know how amazing it is, and hence we have the same motivation to watch Esports regardless of different nationalities.

■ Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports

5. *Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the similarities and differences are?*

I do not see that there is a stark difference between people who watching Esports and traditional sports. For example, I watch swimming contest in Olympics as well because I was a part of swimming club during high school. In my point of view, both of them remind me the old good times and both of them are the means for amusement, so I believe the factor of escapism and entertainment value are the same across two sports.

In terms of appreciation of players' skill, I would say that they are also the same, because I had experience in *Street Fighter* and in competitive swimming, I understand how to play them and I know how much effort these players have put in order to reach the highest level of competition. The skills they present in the competition maybe varied due to different mediums of transmission, but the inner beauties of these skills are the same. In conclusion, I think that the motivations for Esports spectatorship and traditional sports viewership are essentially the same.

6. *What do you think the reasons behind those differences?*

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7. *Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?*

Yes. Because they share so many similarities such as competitiveness, coordination between eyes and hands, aesthetics, the effort they have put so and so forth.

5.1.3. Shohei Taguchi, 29, Male, Japan

■ *Self-Introduction & How do you related to Esports?*

I met Esports when I was working at TV Tokyo in 2015, I was in charge of sales, directing and production of Esports tournaments. Two years later, I left TV Tokyo and became a freelance commentator for Esports, I have commented on various Esports titles such as *Apex*, *Fortnite* and *Valorant* as well as *League of Legends*. In total, I have more than 5 years of experience in the Esports industry.

■ Section 1: Esports overview

1. As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?

The first reason I believe is the increasing sponsorship globally. It is clear that Esports is the new trend for current young generation, many Japanese children want to be professional gamers in the future. So, for marketers, it is obvious that Esports is effective mean to approach young people and grab their interest. With more commercial investments injected in the Esports, Esports is growing in a fast pace accordingly.

There are also some other reasons which affect the growth of Esports. It is hard not to mention the changing perception towards video games, this is not only limited within children and young generation, but also for their parents and elders. People now are more open to accept Esports because they witness the championship these Esports athletes have won and regularization of the industry.

One more thing to add is the Covid-19, I think this pandemic reduces people's options for recreation activities, people now need to stay at home and quarantine, hence they have more time on video games and watching Esports as Esports tournaments could be held online, which facilitates the growth of Esports in an indirect way.

2. How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one from other countries?

Compare to other countries, the Esports market in Japan is still small and growing. There was no clear direction, support and regulation from Japanese government until last year, so before that, it was impossible to organize Esports tournaments in a big scale and draw sponsorships since the ambiguous governance, it results a relatively slow start for the Esports development in Japan.

In addition, Japanese players share a different gaming culture with rest of the world, console games are dominant in Japan such as Nintendo and Play Station while most countries mainly playing games on personal computers. Since Esports is generally conducted through mouse and keyboard, this gap on different gaming cultures makes Esports a bit of unacclimatized in Japan.

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. *What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?*

Watching Esports is like burning my heart. After I watch some super plays by professional players, I really want to start the game and have a try on my own. Therefore, the motivations for me to watch Esports is that I enjoy watching those amazing outplays by pro-players and I want to learn their skills. For example, I like watch *Super Smash Bro.* and my favorite player is called Zackray, it is no doubt that I like to see him playing since he is very talented, he has won the world championship when he was only 17 years old, I am amazed by his move, his skill and his timing to counter-attack, I understand how amazing these outplays are because I know the game and I comment on it. Moreover, I learn how to play new champions from Zackray due to his insanely deep character pool. Unlike other professional players who usually can master around 5 champions in game, Zackray is able to play over 20 champions in *Super Smash Bro.* contests.

Other reasons why I watch Esports include sociality. I always watch *Super Smash Bro.* with my friends, I like to talk with them and cheer for our favorite players together. That feeling is good because you can easily resonate with them, we speak the same language and terminology. So, I feel that I am in a bigger community and this sense of belonging keeps me watching Esports.

4. *Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?*

I think they are the same across all countries, people get together to watch Esports and many of go the venue to watch the tournament, you can see that Esports viewers all cheer for their home

teams in the competition. On top of that, I think the biggest similarity is that if you are a Esports viewer, we all understand the game in a degree, which means that we all are able to appreciate the great skills by those professional players regardless your nationality. I think that is reason why some top Esports athletes usually have a diverse fan base.

■ **Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports**

5. Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the similarities and differences are?

I think there is no difference between watching Esports and watching traditional sports. On the one hand, I think that all Esports professional players put their biggest efforts in training, they spend a lot of to formulate tactics, their attitudes towards the competition is also very serious just like traditional sports. On the other hand, we as Esports spectators respect such sportsmanship in a same manner compared with soccer or baseball athletes. Therefore, I think that no matter you are interested in Esports or traditional sports, the story behind those players, the rivalry of the game and so forth are the common motivations across two areas.

6. What do you think the reasons behind those differences?

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7. Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?

No. Because the sport should be a competition of physicality in people's mind, but I think that Esports does not have to be a sport, it already has its unique charm and should not be constrained by the definition of sport.

Section 2. INTERVIEW WITH FAN

5.2.1. Wang Jingyi, 23, Female, China

■ *Self-Introduction & How do you related to Esports?*

I started to play Esports games since high school, the game I usually play is *League of Legends* (LOL). I begin to watch the professional LOL games from last year, so I have more than one-year experience of being a Esports fan. Whenever there is a tournament being hold, no matter it is local or global, if my home team participates in the tournament, I watch it every day even the matches they do not play, and I spend around 2-3 hours per day on watching Esports during that time.

■ Section 1: Esports overview

1. As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?

I am not familiar with the other countries, but in China, I would say that the first reason is that competitive video games has a huge customer base in China especially for LOL. Every youth in China knows about this game and people around me all play this game. On top of that, I believe the increasing regularization of Esports tournaments during these years make these contests more enjoyable. With more formal governances on team management, tournament rules and game mechanisms, the league become more competitive and attractive, so at a result, it has more and more viewers.

The second reason I believe is that Esports is getting more attention from the public because the achievement that Esports athletes have won in recent two years. For example, in LOL world championship 2018, a Chinese team called Invictus Gaming (IG) have won the championship, and it is the first world title for China in the 8-year history of LOL. It suddenly drew the massive attention not only in the player community, but also many traditional media platforms. Due to the opportunity that the Chinese team won at a global stage, Esports in China enjoyed more media exposure, which helps to attract more sponsorships and investments.

2. How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one from other countries?

Due to my experience, I would say people's preference towards games is different across countries. For example, multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games are dominant in China and Asia countries, while western countries have a huge market for first person shooter (FPS) games. I have seen a report which says that the two biggest Esports titles are *League of Legends* and *CS: GO*, but I rarely see *CS: GO* professional leagues active in China.

Another difference that I noticed is the perception towards competitive gaming. In most Asia culture, playing games is not perceived as a good thing to do or a feasible career to pursue, meanwhile people in western countries are open to Esports because of their value and ideology. It is important to notice that this difference is diminishing because many governments now begin to support the Esports industry as well as people's attitude towards Esports is gradually changing through the witness of achievements by those Esports athletes.

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?

I would say that the biggest reason I watch Esports is because I am interested in certain player, for me, it is JackeyLove in IG. To explain why, firstly, his achievement is remarkable. JackeyLove has won his first world championship when he was only 17 years old, in the history of LOL in China, he is the first one to get such achievement. Not to mention that he is very talented, he is famous for his aggressive playstyle. Also, it is important to notice that he is very attractive physically, he is really handsome, and he is like an idol who plays Esports, but he plays it very well. Overall, I became a fan of him because of his appearance and achievement.

The second reason I watch Esports is to relax and escape from my daily routine. Sometimes I want to get away from my hectic academic life for one moment, then I choose to watch Esports. So, I guess watching Esports serves as a mind anesthesia for me just like other means of entertainment. Therefore, I think it is replaceable if I can find something else that I can enjoy.

4. Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?

Personally speaking, I do not think that there is a difference. People watch Esports for various reasons, I cannot assume that my motives are universal across countries, but my motives definitely exist in other nations. People watch Esports because they are interested in certain players like me, or they want to relax, or they want their home team to win. Accordingly, I would say that these motivations might vary by individuals in degree, but they are similar in most aspects.

■ **Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports**

5. Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the similarities and differences are?

Compare to traditional sports, I believe that they are the same in terms of interest in players and their achievements. Similarly, in a traditional sports context, I think they also watch it because they want to have some fun, the competitiveness as well as rivalry are also there to motivate them to watch.

However, in Esports, I feel that the level of connection and engagement to professional players is much stronger than traditional sports. More specifically, I feel the gap or the distance between Esports viewers and pro-players is closer than traditional sports. For example, it is easier for me to attach myself with Esports pro-players rather than traditional sports athletes. In other words, for me, the vicarious achievement of Esports is easier to obtain than traditional sports.

6. What do you think the reasons behind those differences?

I think this difference is credited to the nature of Esports, Esports heavily relies on the technology of Internet which makes the world a smaller place by bringing everyone closer, which include Esports spectators and Esports athletes. Many of these Esports pro-players are streamers as well, they stream on various platforms such as Twitch, Douyu and YouTube, and these media platforms allow viewers to actively interact with Esports athletes through chats. Moreover, due to the commercial reasons, professional Esports teams also motivate their players to stream, because of that, Esports viewers now have more opportunities to approach the professional players. In contrast, I do not think you have so many chances to directly get in touch with famous athletes in a traditional sports context like soccer. In conclusion, I think the nature of Esports and its business ecosystem

play important roles for this disparity.

7. Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?

No. For me, I would still think that the sport should involve a lot of physical activities, and Esports does not require a large amount of physical exertions. Esports is more like a competition rather than a sport in my point of view.

5.2.2. Jonathan Carter Frevola, 25, Male, U.S.

■ ***Self-Introduction & How do you related to Esports?***

I play *Super Smash Bros.* since I was in high school, I started playing this game because I got convinced by my friends. I played it quite often when I was young, now I do not have much time, so I tend to watch professional plays more. I formed a Esports club that is specific for *Super Smash Bros.* and even joined the tournament in Florida.

■ **Section 1: Esports overview**

1. As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?

I think the biggest reason is the generation who has grown up with video games, when I was a kid, everyone around me plays video games like Game Boy and Play Station and so do I, the huge customer base which video games possess is undeniable. I think our generation has more exposure to video games, and when we grow up, we tend to have a different perception regarding to the competitive gaming compared to our parents. It is no longer an evil thing to do, the stigma of video games is getting away. Hence, I think the changing bigger environment matters, our generation are more open to accept Esports, which helps the industry to grow.

2. How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one from other countries?

I would the preference towards games is different by countries, which results that different countries are good at different games. For example, in my point of view, western countries are better at fighting games that is mainly 1v1 and First Person Shooter (FPS) games, while Asian countries are high on team based games like Multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) which normally is 5v5. I assume this disparity is caused by different sport cultures, in America, individualism is deep rooted, which leads a stronger preference toward those games that can fully demonstrate individual values like *Street Fighter*, *Super Smash Bros* and *Call of Duty*. I think this difference might affect marketers in Esports as well because the focus of their promotion is varied by countries.

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. *What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?*

The biggest reason why I watch Esports is appreciation of skills by professional players. I like to see something which should not be happened, but it happened. I really like to see the amazing outplays by those Esports athletes, if you know this game well, you will understand how hard to execute such crazy plays, these plays cannot be achieved by average players. It is not about lifting your fingers to do some braindead plays cause it not fun at all, it is more about the combination of your techniques and minds. These plays always challenge the limit of people's imagination and unlock the infinite potential of certain character in games. For example, there is an unbalanced champion in *Super Smash Bro.* named Ice Climbers due to his overpowered skill – wobbling. This skill is got banned for many Esports tournaments for *Super Smash Bro.*, so not many players use this champion anymore, but there is one pro-player who has won the world championship by exploring a new playstyle of Ice Climbers. I was so impressed by his play because he really goes further beyond the rules and imaginations.

4. *Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?*

I think they are mostly the same, only small differences in the degree of those motivations. For instance, the national identity has a relatively less impact on why people watch Esports in America, while some Asian countries like Chinese and Korean Esports viewers have a strong tie with the national pride. Overall, I would say that the motivations of watching Esports depend more on individuals rather than countries.

■ Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports

5. *Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the similarities and differences are?*

I believe they are quite similar in the aspects of appreciation of skills, for example, you watch these sport athletes read and anticipate their counterparts' moves and counter-attack them, no matter in Esports or traditional sports, you will be astonished and cheer for those plays. In addition, I think they are similar in terms of drama and unpredictability since you never know who will win at the end,

and you not only watch the contest itself, you follow the story of certain players like how do they get there, what is the episode behind them, are they looking for a revenge just like many traditional sports.

In contrast, I think that watching Esports gives me more excitement. When I look at those amazing outplays in *Super Smash Bro.*, I am more triggered than watching highlights of traditional sports. I feel there is less perceived limit in Esports where it allows players to stretch more towards the ceiling.

6. What do you think the reasons behind those differences?

I believe the reason is the inherent mechanism about the video game. Video game is inherently deeper than traditional sports because of programming, one single move in the video game can involve dozens of factors, for example, the timing to cast many powerful one-shot skills are only doable in a tiny time frame and if you miss it, you miss the game entirely. Moreover, how to counter-attack enemy's moves requires exquisite techniques from those Esports players, you need to react in a really short time after your counterpart casted a specific skill. All of these are just a small portion of Esports, not to even mention about the creativity, strategies, and subtle mechanisms presented in Esports contests. The more you know about the game, the more interest you find the Esports is. To sum up, I think video games offers a bigger room for players to explore and challenge the limit that goes beyond the physical body, so in my point of view, watching Esports is more exciting because it is a better way to demonstrate the skill of athletes.

7. Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?

Yes, I think it is a sport since many aspects of Esports resemble with traditional sports such as the community, entertainment value, competition and players' attitude toward the game.

5.2.3. Ma Li, 23, Male, China

■ ***Self-Introduction & How do you related to Esports?***

I started to play competitive video games since 2016, the game I play is *Overwatch*. I like its graphics, stories and the unique playstyle which combines first person shooter (FPS) and multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), I even attended an *Overwatch* semi-professional contest in 2018. Now, I almost watch *Overwatch* professional competitions everyday whenever there is a major tournament being hold. In *Overwatch* professional league, I mainly support Shanghai Dragon and Chengdu Hunters and some top-level foreign teams.

■ **Section 1: Esports overview**

1. As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?

Firstly, I think the entry barrier for Esports is low. Since Esports is conducted through video games, and video games have huge customer base because you can enjoy it as long as you have a personal computer and Internet. And the target customer of video games is all-inclusive, from kids to adults, even elders. Hence, people who play these video games will potentially increase the number of Esports viewers. I also think the pandemic happened last year is responsible for Esports growth in short-term, with people cannot go out anymore and increasing time of quarantine, people tend to spend more on video games, which further stimulates the growth of Esports.

Secondly, I think it has to do with the technology. For example, Internet provides an easy mean for people to connect with a larger community. Since Esports is derived from Internet, the expansion speed of Esports communities is very rapid, people do not need to sit together in order to discuss about the game, we can talk about the contest with somebody even I do not know on different online media channels like Discord, in-game chat and streaming platforms, and soon we become a community. In general, I think that Esports is growing exponentially because these expanding online communities.

2. How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one

from other countries?

The biggest difference is the social attitude toward Esports. In 2000, the majority Chinese treat Esports as a drug, they call it virtual heroin. Even in 10 years ago, many parents were still heavily against their children to start a career in competitive gaming. Compare to Korea, Esports is long perceived as a legitimate job and their Esports business ecosystem is more mature than China. For example, they address their Esports players as athletes and their team management structure is more systematic. I think the reason why this difference exist is the support from government, Korea started to regulate and foster the growth of Esports in early 2000's, which really gave them a lead to stay ahead. Nonetheless, this misperception in China is gradually changing due to the government promotion, rise of Internet industry and achievement of Esports professional players.

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. *What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?*

The first reason why I watch Esports is appreciation of skills by those pro-players. Since I play this game, I understand how hard to pull out such amazing outplays, it is not about only moving your fingers, it is about your mind plus your reaction and so much more. For instance, there is a Chinese player in Chengdu Hunter team called Elsa, he really masters one champion in the game named D.VA, he uses this champion to trick his opponents and counter their ultimate skills to turn around the situation in game in a way that you cannot image. You will certainly be stunned by his play if you know how to play *Overwatch*. On top of that, I learn these skills by watching the outplays from these players, I learn how they cast skill shot, where they cast their ultimate, which route do they choose for attacking and so on. It is effective to learn these skills by watching Esports professional leagues than learning it by yourself because casters will help you to comprehend the moves of those pro-players.

And watching Esports is fun for me, I like to play *Overwatch*, so it is obvious for me to watch the top-level competition of my favorite game, it is certainly one way for me to entertain and relieve my stress. Another reason why I like watching Esports is social factors. I always talk with my friends while watching Esports, we discuss the current progress of the game, we talk about

characteristics of different players and predict the outcome of the game. At that moment, I feel like that I am a part of this community and I am not alone, there are other people who understand my interest, I guess that is also why I keep watching Esports.

One more reason to add is my association to the team which I support. Since I am a Chinese, I support teams that come from my home country such as Shanghai Dragon and Chengdu Hunters. I wish them to win because I feel that they represent me in some way, so I think this kind of connection and attachment to the team motivate me to watch Esports as well.

4. Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?

I believe they are the same in most areas like interest in game, knowledge acquisition and appreciation of pro-players' skill. Most significantly, in *Overwatch* professional league, each team has their hometown in their names, so the attachment to these teams are the same, no matter where you from, you all want your home team to win. However, I think there might be differences in the degree of those motivations, for example, Chinese and Korean Esports viewers have a strong enthusiasm towards the victory and see Esports as a competition between two regions, while spectators in western countries also have that motives, but they focus more on entertainment value and sociability of Esports.

■ Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports

5. Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the similarities and differences are?

I think they are similar in terms of entertainment value, eustress, rivalry, competitiveness, interest in sport/game. Moreover, as mentioned above, the attachment to certain teams and vicarious achievement are the same with traditional sports like soccer because we all project ourselves to the team and wish them to win.

The differences I noticed include physical attractiveness, acquisition of knowledge and excitement. Firstly, Esports spectators rarely care about the physical conditions of players. Secondly, I think traditional sport viewers have a less incentive to learn the skills from professional athletes. And lastly, I suppose Esports is more exciting to watch than traditional sports.

6. *What do you think the reasons behind those differences?*

Physical attractiveness is easy to understand as Esports does not heavily rely on the physical conditions. However, talking about acquisition of knowledge, I feel that there are many constraints exist if you want to imitate them in a traditional sports context. For example, if you want to mirror a slam dunk in basketball, your height matters, your jump ability matters. Even though you meet such physical requirements, it is still hard to imitate as you need lots of time to master it. On the contrary, there is no such physical requirement in Esports, as long as you have a high rank in the game, you can always challenge to mimic the plays from professional players. Overall, the technology makes Esports approachable to everyone, and the entry barrier of Esports is lower than traditional sports.

In the respect of more excitement, I believe that it is credited to the novelty of video games. Video games depict a more colorful world compared to traditional sports. In the game, there is no limit like you can fly, you can cast magics and do gunfights, but such roof does exist in traditional sports. Esports is based on video games, and since video games offer a more vivid sensorial stimulation, I think that watching Esports is more exciting than traditional sports as it expands your fantasy.

7. *Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?*

Yes. I believe the most important factor of a sport is competition, and Esports is a form of competition, you just compete against other people in a different way. Therefore, I would call Esports as a sport.

Section 3. INTERVIEW WITH SPECTATOR

5.3.1. Joshua Tandri, 23, Male, Indonesia

■ *Self-Introduction & How do you related to Esports?*

I started to play competitive games since the first year of my university, mainly *Dota 2*. Of course, the number of times I play *Dota 2* is decreasing as I need to work, but I keep playing it right now. I would say that I did not watch so much Esports at the beginning, but once I reached the certain level in my game, I got into watching it. I only watch major Esports tournaments or primary global contest, especially when big teams play.

■ Section 1: Esports overview

1. As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?

I think the first reason would be the change of people's perception towards Esports, it is the same thing with online shopping, as we get used to these online platforms, the more secure we feel about them. People now are more accepting Esports and appreciating the difficulty of Esports. I believe that the success stories of Esports athletes helps to change people's attitude about Esports which was perceived as evil thing to do. These successful Esports players make millions of dollars and being very good at competitive games, it becomes an actual career technically because they get wages, bonuses and allowances just like other normal jobs.

One other reason is that Esports is basically free to watch, in other words, its accessibility and availability. You can just watch the Esports stream on YouTube and Twitch, there is no difference than watching it in a stadium except euphoria. In football, you need to pay for the ticket or subscription, but it is free for Esports. The reason they set it for free maybe because Esports does not have many expenses compared to traditional sports. For example, in traditional sports, you need to maintain the stadium, the field and many costs from labors. I understand Esports also needs a venue and so on, but the utility rate is much higher than traditional sports due to the nature of virtual sports. For example, you can rent one stadium to host more than 20 games in a day, which is

impossible for football. Therefore, I believe it is cheaper to run Esports tournaments and there is no need for them to charge a subscription.

2. How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one from other countries?

In terms of Esports itself like the game and the viewership, I would not say that there is much difference between Indonesia and other major countries. The viewership, the seriousness, the engagement level is very high, it does not lose to China, or Europe or any other country.

However, in terms of cultivating Esports professional players, team management and government regulation, Indonesia loses out to other major countries. I guess the reason is lack of sponsorship, the companies in Indonesia are quite traditional, they do not realize the potential of Esports, so no sufficient resources have been invested in Esports, which resulted a negative loop. Without investment, no proper system could be formed, which means that it is hard to cultivate famous players, as a result, no popularity means no sponsorship. I think the government would not invest in Esports in a foreseeable future as well as their resources are already tied up with the investment on infrastructures.

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?

The number one reason is that I want to know what pro-players are doing. It is a process of learning, I want to learn that how they move in a certain time frame, how they do ganks, what kind of item builds do they make under what situations. Moreover, I acquire knowledge about the game from watching Esports, for instance, there are lot of patches going on in *Dota 2*, I do not have to read them all, so I watch professional plays and listen to casters in order quickly understand these new updates. These techniques and knowledge will be brought into my future gameplay.

Rivalry is another reason why I watch Esports. This is not about the nationality, it is more related to the drama, episode and story behind certain teams or players. For example, there is a *Dota 2* team called OG, the captain and co-captain of this team have been together for over 10 years since they were playing together in Internet cafés, but one day the captain left the team and joined another

team called EG in the middle of a tournament, the things suddenly become very intense. So, whenever OG vs. EG, I would like to watch how it goes. In addition, there is another *Dota 2* team called Secret which is initially founded by pure players instead of any sponsors, I like to watch them play as well.

4. *Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?*

I do have friends from other countries in Malaysia and UK who watch *Dota 2*, but I do not see difference between why we watch Esports. Because mostly, we watch it because we all want to see how pro-players perform and the fun of competition, I do not think there is difference in motivation between me and my friends. I do not believe that there will be a huge disparity across the countries because gamers are similar no matter where you from, the motivations of watching Esports might be different by individual, but by country, I do not think there is a difference.

■ Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports

5. *Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the similarities and differences are?*

I can think more differences than similarities in this regard. I do have more attachment to traditional sports than Esports. For example, in Esports, I do not wish either team to win, I see Esports more like an entertainment to me, but in football, I have a strong desire to support England teams, so I want my home team – Arsenal to win. Furthermore, I have set many role models in the realm of football such as Thierry Henry, Arsene Wenger, Zinedine Zidane and such, but not in Esports. To sum up, the engagement level, attachment level and commitment level are much higher for me in a traditional sports context.

In terms of similarities, I think they are same in the aspects of competitiveness and appreciation of the skills by pro-players. I enjoy the competition and watch people to do what they are good at, so I enjoy football players to dance around the football same with Esports players showing their amazing techniques.

6. *What do you think the reasons behind those differences?*

I think the why I attach to football more is the generation, when I was young, there was no

Esports, there was Arsenal football club, so I grew up with Arsenal and attach myself to it. It becomes a part of my life/my routine, when they win, I become happy, when they lose, I get sad. Talking about Esports, it never ingrained in me because I only started it when I was in the university, it just became an additional thing to me. Hence, I believe that the environment I grew up with matters, especially when you live in UK, everyone around you watches football, the culture of football is dominant in England, so you follow around. That strong culture of soccer induced me to build a sense of belonging in relation to Arsenal football club.

On top of that, I think the media exposure of Esports is still relatively low. I watch football players not only when they on the field, but also their news and shows they attend, however in Esports, there is not much such thing happening. The current focus of many major media platforms is still not targeting Esports since the interest of Esports viewers is not comparable with traditional sport spectators. Besides, I like intelligent people, I found that many phrases and quotes from football practitioners especially those who have a rich life experience are applicable and resonant to me, and that is why I set them for my role models and keep watching them. Whereas in Esports, I would not care about the saying by Esports athletes like Faker because I think that they are just gamers and they have relatively shallow experience in life.

7. Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?

Yes. Because my definition for sport is the competition. Anything that can be turned into a competition is a sport for me. It is not about physicality, it is about the rivalry for me, and since you compete with someone else in Esports, then I believe it is a sport.

5.3.2. Liao Jia, 28, Female, China

■ ***Self-Introduction & How do you related to Esports?***

I am a casual player of video games, I mainly play *Hearthstone* and *Overwatch*. I watch Esports time to time, especially the Esports news and some important matches such as finals and semi-finals because I do not have time now due to my academic workload. Recently, the Esports content that I am watching is League of Legends Mid-Season Invitational 2021 (MSI).

■ **Section 1: Esports overview**

1. As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?

I believe there are 3 reasons in relation to the growth of the Esports market. First of all, I think Esports is currently in a stage of its early development. Esports is still a very young industry, there were many blanks in past few years for Esports. Therefore, the speed of early development in any industry is fast, and so is Esports. Borrow from the framework of Product Life Cycle, I believe Esports is in the stage of Growth right now, so it is developing in a very fast pace.

Secondly, I think the way of spreading for Esports is vital for its growth. Esports is heavily rely on new media for its dissemination such as streaming platforms, forums, blogs and video sharing websites. With the popularization of Internet and smart devices, people now have an easier access to Esports, in turn, Esports could promote itself to these potential customers in a more effective manner.

Lastly, the generation which have grown up with video games is stepping into the society, they now are able to justify the concept of Esports. They are gradually changing the general perception toward competitive gaming which was perceived as an evil thing to do, now it is becoming fine to be accepted by the general public. As a result, more and more people have joined this industry, which further helps the growth of Esports.

2. How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one from other countries?

I am not too familiar with the Esports business ecosystem in other country, but I believe one of the reasons why Esports developing so fast in China is its less government interferences at the beginning. For example, in China, there is no rigorous regulation on the prize pool of Esports tournaments, however in Japan, I heard that there was a certain regulation to cap the prize money of any Esports tournament under \$900, which might inhibit the advancement of Japanese Esports development.

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. *What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?*

Firstly, I watch Esports because I want to learn the skills of professional players. These skills not restricted by the outplays of professional players, but also their creative mind plays. For example, I learn new attacking routes in *Overwatch* professional leagues, I learn new decks in *Hearthstone* contests. I learn their playstyle, their thinking, their tempo to approach the game to make me perform better in my own game.

Secondly, I watch Esports because of I want to relax, or I want to entertain myself. Watching Esports allows me to escape from daily routine like the school life, the enjoyment I get from watching Esports is same as watching American dramas. Watching Esports is just one of my many recreation activities and its ranking is not always the highest one.

Finally, association with a certain team or a certain player motivates me to watch Esports. I found myself extremely proud when my home country's team winning, or when a female professional player winning at an international tournament such as the first female champion in *Hearthstone* named Liooon. The vicarious achievement, more specifically, this sense of connection and honor are also the reasons why I watch Esports.

4. *Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?*

I am not too sure about other countries, but I guess they are mostly the same. I do not know why people in other countries watch Esports specifically, but I believe my motivations for watching Esports definitely exist in other countries. For example, a lot of Korean Esports viewers watch the contexts because they severely want their teams to win, which is the same as me.

■ Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports

5. Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the similarities and differences are?

From my personal perspective, I believe they are the same in terms of entertainment value, appreciation of the skills of professional players and social factors. For instance, when you go to the stadium to watch sports, you have a chance to get to know other people who have a similar interest with you. I believe this is the same in Esports, you go to the venue and find there are many people who like the same thing, and soon you guys become friends.

On the other hand, I believe they are different in respect of acquisition of knowledge which is significant for Esports viewers but might not be the case for traditional sports spectators. For example, after you watched an amazing play by professional players, you strongly want to imitate that in a Esports context, but there is less desire you want to do it in a traditional sport context. Moreover, I believe that traditional sports provide more excitement and level of engagement than Esports offers.

6. What do you think the reasons behind those differences?

For acquisition of knowledge, it is clear that Esports is more approachable to the general public. If you want to mirror those amazing plays by professional players, you need to find your teammates and reserve a playing field in a traditional sport context, but there is no such requirement in Esports. Besides, in traditional sports, the physical requirement of such plays is too high for most fans, but in Esports, these plays can be more easily achieved. Overall, the cost of knowledge acquisition for Esports is so much cheaper compared with traditional sports due to the accessibility of video games.

In terms of excitement and level of engagement, I believe that when you sit at the stadium, the cheers and interactions from traditional sports are more breathtaking. In traditional sports, cheers are evident to support the teams, people beside you will also cheer with you, which leads to a more immersive experience on site. In addition, due to the feature that traditional sports do not have many boundaries between viewers and players, interactions and communication appeared more directly in

traditional sports, which results a higher level of engagement. However, in a Esports context, the level of interaction and engagement is limited due to an intermedia between spectators and professional players, which is the video game. Professional players compete by controlling characters in the virtual world, and Esports spectators primarily watch the plays from those virtual characters in a bigger screen instead of professional players themselves.

7. Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?

Yes. Sports like soccer and basketball mainly compete on physical body, while sports like chess mainly compete on mind. I believe Esports is qualified as a sport because it sits in the middle of these two. From my point of view, Esports is a competition that combines both physical body and mind.

5.3.3. Vincent Yap Kah Jiun, 34, Male, Brunei

■ ***Self-Introduction & How do you related to Esports?***

I started to play video games since high school and keep doing so a little bit in my college time, but currently I do not have time to play any. I don't call myself a Esports fan because I am not competitive in a sense, but I watch some Esports from time to time like *Counter-Strike* and *Starcraft* especially the stream on YouTube, highlights and clips of those professional leagues.

■ **Section 1: Esports overview**

1. As Esports market is growing exponentially in recent year, what do think the possible reasons are?

I the main reason is down to accessibility. Personal computers were quite expensive to have, but right now, these hardware are becoming cheaper now. so, everyone can have a personal computer to access video games and Esports. Moreover, the appearance of Internet helps the formation of online community such as Twitch or Reddit, which leads toa higher social involvement, you feel united and it keeps your interest high. And I think this is a good circle, with more people join into the community, it attracts more advertisement and sponsorship, which leads to a bigger exposure of Esports and more newcomers.

One more thing to add is that I see more and more commercial is getting involved in Esports, which stimulates the development of Esports. They see the potentials of Esports while they want to promote their product to this growing group of potential customers. With their increasing investments, the market size of Esports is surely expanding.

2. How do you compare the Esports ecosystem in your home country with the one from other countries?

I think I can talk about people's perception regarding to Esports in Brunei. People think sport is not a viable choice for career since only the top (maybe 5%) makes reasonable income, not to even mention about Esports, it is viewed as a less viable career for most parents in my country. Competitive gaming received a lot of negativity in Brunei, they treat Esports more as a hobby

instead of a proper job. I believe in western countries such as U.S. and Europe have a more open perspective on Esports as they are more liberal. I think this has to do with their cultures, values of freedom, way of living and their education system. On top of that, I believe these western countries are wealthier, so they can think Esports as a profession, they have more opportunities to explore and challenge. Oppositely, in developing countries, Esports is more like a luxury.

■ Section 2: Motivations of Esports viewership

3. *What motivates you to watch Esports? And Why?*

I watch Esports because I want to the skills of professional players. For example, in real time strategy game (RTS) like *Starcraft*, I want to see their build orders, when they build it and why they build that way. They are many strategies used in the game, I learn their playstyle as well, when to rush your enemy and when to expand your territory. This is the same in first person shooter (FPS) games, I watch them because I want to know which attacking routes they choose, what weapons they buy under certain circumstances. I watch them play and learn from it, so I can put these techniques into my own game plays.

Secondly, appreciation of skills by those pro-players is also my motivation. I would say that in sometimes, you see some players who have less, but they are able to overcome the counterpart with more, and I think that is impressive. Basically, when you see a losing player coming back against the winning player by their micro plays and macro strategies, you will be so amazed by it. For example, in FPS, I am excited to see one underdog to turn-around the situation by using merely a handgun with a low health bar.

4. *Do you think those motives might be varied by countries? And why is that?*

First of all, in my opinion, motives are quite subjective. However, I believe there are quite similar across various countries. I am not sure about what other people are thinking, maybe in America, people watch Esports because its entertainment value, but I think my motives definitely exist in other countries even though they might slightly differ in the degree.

■ Section 3: Comparison with traditional sports

5. *Compare to the motivations of watching traditional sports, what do you think the*

similarities and differences are?

The main difference I believe is that traditional sports is easy to understand, which means I can easily enjoy them. The rules of traditional sports are consistent, they do not change very much. Even you do not play this type of sport, you can understand it and enjoy watching it. In contrast, Esports is always changing in many aspects such as rules, maps, objectives and mechanisms. For example, if I am not familiar with the game, I will get lost very fast in watching Esports. Esports is so dynamic, it is evolving all the time, and you will be confused if you do not follow the game frequently. Therefore, I believe the novelty of Esports makes its entertainment value limited to all people compared with traditional sports due to the continuous knowledge requirement.

However, they are similar in a way that if you know about the game more, you will enjoy more. For example, if you know the player, the club, the coach and tactics of the game, you will enjoy the game more. I think it is the same with Esports, if I know the backgrounds of those players, episodes of their teams and their journeys, I believe I will enjoy Esports more since there are more stakes involved in the game. As a result, I believe that both traditional sports and Esports are similar in terms of drama they provide when you have more familiarity about the game.

6. What do you think the reasons behind those differences?

As I mentioned before, I believe this difference exists because games change all the time. More specifically, game developers modify their games frequently and they periodically make new games. The nature of profit orientation motivates game developers to improve on the previous game and publish the better version in order to attract more players. For example, *Starcraft* and *Counter-Strike* were the most popular competitive games back in my age, now is multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) like *League of Legends*. So, I believe that the objective, or the nature of game developer is the key to explain why video games are always changing, which results that not everyone could easily understand Esports.

Another reason might be that technology changes as well. For instance, we have better graphics in today's games, VR is also becoming mature, and since Esports is heavily based on the technology, it inevitably evolves alongside with the changes of technology.

7. Do you believe Esports is a sport? Why do you think so?

No. I think the sport should be very physical, you need to run, sweat and fight. In my dictionary, I believe sports involve more physicality like what you see in Olympics such as soccer, basketball, track and field. Personally speaking, I do not think Esports should be counted as a sport due to the lack of physical exertion.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

Section 1. KEY FINDINGS ON ESPORTS OVERVIEW

Table 2: Summary of interviews on Esports overview

	Reason for Esports growth	Difference in Esports ecosystem
Akihito Furusawa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility • Online community • Perception 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market size in Japan
Takeshi Araki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generation • Accessibility • Covid – 19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market size in Japan
Shohei Taguchi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsorship • Perception • Covid – 19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market size in Japan
Wang Jingyi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer base • Achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference • Perception
Jonathan Carter Frevola	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generation • Perception 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference
Ma Li	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility • Online community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception
Joshua Tandri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception • Accessibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team management • Government regulation
Liao Jia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early stage • Accessibility • Perception 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government interference
Vincent Yap Kah Jiun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility • Sponsorship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception

■: Expert ■: Fan ■: Spectator

Source: Author

According to the table above, most interviewees credit the exponential growth of the Esports market to 2 major reasons, they are accessibility and changing perception. It is no doubt that the great accessibility of video games is the biggest advantage for Esports. On the one hand, along with

the advancement of technology, personal computers and gaming hardware become more affordable to the general public. On the other hand, the low entry barrier of video games makes Esports approachable to everyone. For instance, playing video games does not require much physical activity, plus the fact that there is no need for reserving to a play field and finding teammates or counterparts to start the game for playing video games because the Internet provides a virtual space where players can connect or compete with others more efficiently. As a result, the huge customer base of video games means more potential viewers for Esports.

The second reason which most participants answered is the changing perception, due to the fact that many people now are growing up with video games and their increasing exposure to Esports, they tend to share a more open point of view regarding to competitive gaming than their parents. On top of that, the rise of Internet industry and achievements by Esports athletes in recent years further help to wash off the stereotype and misunderstanding towards Esports.

In terms of differences in Esports ecosystem by countries, it is interesting to notice that all experts point out the small market scale in Japanese Esports industry. This limitation could be reflected by less Esports viewers and the low bidding price of broadcasting rights for Esports tournaments in Japan. The main reasons that experts state are different gaming cultures and inefficient government regulation. Japan does have a deep and rich gaming culture, but it is for console games, while Esports is predominantly conducted through personal computer, keyboard and mouse in the rest of the world, this misfit causes the un-acclimatization when Esports landing on Japan. In terms of government support, the previous restriction on the prize cap of Esports tournaments and late governmental regulation contribute to a low start in Japanese Esports market.

Lastly, although many interviewees admit that the general perception towards Esports is changing, some of them state that Esports is still not perceived as a viable career to pursue in their hometowns. This idea is commonly seen in most Asian countries due to their relatively conservative cultures and values.

Table 3: Summary of interviews on motivations for Esports spectatorship

	Motivations for watching Esports	Difference in motivations by countries
Akihito Furusawa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drama • Appreciation of skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly the same
Takeshi Araki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escapism & Entertainment • Appreciation of skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same all over the world
Shohei Taguchi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of skills • Knowledge acquisition • Sociality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essentially the same across countries
Wang Jingyi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in players • Escapism & Entertainment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No big difference • Varied by individual
Jonathan Carter Frevola	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly the same • Slight differences in the degree
Ma Li	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of skills • Knowledge acquisition • Sociality • Association to the team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same in many aspects • Small differences in the degree
Joshua Tandri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge acquisition • Drama 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No huge disparity • Varied more by individual than country
Liao Jia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge acquisition • Escapism & Entertainment • Association to the player 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly the same
Vincent Yap Kah Jiun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge acquisition • Appreciation of skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar across countries • Tiny differences in the degree

■: Expert ■: Fan ■: Spectator

Source: Author

According to the diagram listed above, there are 2 major contributors to motives for Esports viewership, they include appreciation of skills and knowledge acquisition. Appreciation of skills by Esports professional players is mostly mentioned by interviewees. It is understandable that a large portion of Esports viewers are video gamers themselves, hence they generally possess the experience in the same game, which facilitates the viewers to comprehend, appreciate and admire the super plays presented by Esports professional players. Related to appreciation of skills, the thesis discovers that knowledge acquisition is common motivation for general spectators to watch Esports contests, more specifically, they want to learn from professional players about their techniques, their playstyles and their logics to proceed the game. These knowledges are eventually transferred into the actual gameplay of Esports spectators in order to achieve a better performance in the game.

Other well mentioned motivations are drama, escapism and sociality. Many participants claim that not only the unpredictability and dramatic turns of the game attract them to consume Esports, but also it is about the story and episode behind players and teams. For example, how one team is formed up, what difficulties have they overcome, do they bear any resentment towards another team, do they have the pride to defend the championship or are they the underdog who dares to challenge the throne. All these elements increase the enjoyment of watching Esports by adding more stakes in the game.

In the aspect of escapism, many interviewees say that watching Esports enables them to escape from the daily routines and relieve their stress from day-to-day activities. Moreover, some interviewees across 3 categories say that watching Esports is just one of many recreation activities they have, due to the fact that they provide the same level of entertainment value, watching Esports is replaceable for them.

Based on the interviews, sociality is hard to ignore when it comes to the incentives of Esports viewership. Benefited from the online technology, Esports viewers are easy to connect and interact with a large community through various means such as voice over Internet protocol (VoIP), online forum and streaming platform. This feature stimulates Esports spectators quickly building a sense of belonging, further increases their attachment to watching Esports due to the same language been

spoken and mutual understanding.

Surprisingly, all interviewees believe that there should be no substantial difference in the motivations across countries. However, it is important to point out that many participants do realize the slight variation in the degree of those motivations. For instance, many Chinese and Korean Esports viewers focus on the national identity and rivalry between different regions, while western Esports viewers pay more attention to the entertainment value and sociality. Overall, the motivations for Esports spectatorship are very subjective, these motivations are more varied by individuals rather than countries.

Table 4: Summary of interviews on comparison with traditional sports

	Similarities compared to traditional sports	Differences compared to traditional sports	Reasons on those differences
Akihito Furusawa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drama • Appreciation of skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japanese culture • Patriotism
Takeshi Araki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escapism & Entertainment • Appreciation of skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No stark difference 	×
Shohei Taguchi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of skills • Knowledge acquisition • Sociality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No difference 	×
Wang Jingyi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in players • Escapism & Entertainment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of attachment & engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The technology of Internet • Commercial nature
Jonathan Carter Frevola	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of skills • Drama • Unpredictability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanism about the video game
Ma Li	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escapism & Entertainment • Rivalry • Interest in sport/game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical attractiveness • Acquisition of knowledge • Excitement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility • Novelty of the video game
Joshua Tandri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitiveness • Appreciation of skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attachment to the team • Role model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generation • Media exposure • Life experience
Liao Jia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escapism & Entertainment • Appreciation of skills • Sociality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of knowledge • Level of engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility • Transmission medium
Vincent Yap Kah Jiun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drama • Appreciation of skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entertainment value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial nature • Technology changes

■: Expert ■: Fan ■: Spectator

Source: Author

On the basis of table 3, it is evident to see that a lot of motivations between Esports and traditional sports are the same such as appreciation of skills, escapism & entertainment value, rivalry and drama. Among all similarities, appreciation of skills is heavily acknowledged again because regardless of Esports viewers or traditional sports viewers, they all have a certain degree of

experience or familiarity regarding to the game they watch, which stimulates them to enjoy the contest more by understanding the rules, the mechanisms and the difficulty of players' skills. Moreover, since both Esports and traditional sports are a form of competition, they offer the identical values in terms of competitiveness, rivalry and drama for spectators. This finding on the similarities is consistent with the research by Pizzo et al. (2018), which claims that most motivations (11 out of 15) of Esports spectatorship share a similar pattern with incentives of traditional sports consumption, including the ones mentioned above.

In the matter of differences, though two experts believe that there is no stark difference in motivations between watching Esports and watching traditional sports, the paper discovers that there are 3 major disparities in motivations based on the result of interviews. First of all, acquisition of knowledge is an essential motivation to explain why people watch Esports, however, this motivation might not be as crucial in a traditional sports context. The basic reason is that there are so many prerequisites in traditional sports when mirroring the skills from professional players. For example, if a traditional sports viewer wants to learn the super plays from their favorite athletes, they need to firstly solve the problem of reserving a playfield as well as gathering enough people to start the game. Even though they manage to overcome such difficulties, there are also preconditions in the aspect of physicality in order to mirror such plays such as height, weight and strength, needless to say the time for practicing such skills. In contrast, there is no such many physical prerequisites in a Esports context as long as someone has the access to personal computers and Internet, the great accessibility of video games allows Esports viewers to learn the skills from professional players in a much easier way.

Secondly, the level of excitement which provided by Esports is higher than traditional sports due to the novelty of video games. One interviewee (Jonathan, fan) claims that the inherent mechanism of video games is deeper than traditional sports because of the programming. In video games, there are dozens of factors involved in just one single move, which stretches the limit of professional players' skills. Another interviewee (Ma li, fan) further supplements that watching Esports is more exciting because video games depict a colorful virtual world which satisfies the

fantasy for their players. In short, this difference is credited to a higher upper limit of video games which allows Esports to go beyond the limitations of traditional sport competitions.

The last disparity lies on the vicarious achievement, in other words, the level of attachment and engagement. The opinions toward this matter are separated, there is one statement (Wang Jingyi, fan) believes that Esports viewers tend have more incentives in vicarious achievement than traditional sports spectators because now streaming platforms provide an easy channel to connect and communicate with Esports athletes, which leads to a greater level of attachment for Esports spectators. Nonetheless, the claim from another interviewee (Liao Jia, spectator) indicates that the level of engagement for traditional sports is deeper than Esports especially when watching the game on site, unlike the Esports contest which people need to look at the big screen to watch the competition, there is less boundaries between athletes and viewers in a traditional sport contest. As a result, the communication and interaction are happened more directly on site for traditional sports, which means a more immersive watching experience for spectators. In summary, due to different mediums of transmission, the thesis explores that the motivation of vicarious achievement for Esports viewers is lower than traditional sports spectators on site, but it is higher when it comes to off the scene.

Section 4. WHETHER ESPORTS SHOULD BE SEEN AS A SPORT

Table 5: Interview result on whether Esports is a sport

	Akihito Furusawa	Takeshi Araki	Shoichi Taguchi	Wang Jingyi	Jonathan Carter Frevola	Ma Li	Joshua Tandri	Liao Jia	Vincent Yap Kah Jiun
Is Esports a sport?	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

■: Expert
 ■: Fan
 ■: Spectator

Source: Author

In the academic world, it is still debatable that whether Esports is sport or not. The thesis finds the same situation when asking this question to participants, there is no consistent response across interviewees. However, it is interesting to notice that most naysayers do not believe Esports is a sport because it does not involve too much physicality, while many yeasayers support that Esports should be seen as a sport because the sport should not only about the physical exertion, but also the mind, attitude and so forth. Therefore, the paper proposes that whether Esports is a sport should depend on people’s definitions toward the sport.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

Section 1. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In conclusion, as Esports is rapidly growing in recent years, it becomes more and more vital to understand the customer behavior of increasing Esports spectators. This research aims to identify the motivations of Esports spectatorship and further delves on the previous studies by exploring that how and why those motivations differ from the incentives of traditional sports viewership. The thesis contributes to develop a better understanding of customer behaviors in the realm of Esports and assists marketers in this industry to approach spectators in a more efficient manner.

The first major finding of this study is that appreciation of skills by professional players is the leading motivation for Esports viewership because most viewers have the experience in the same game. On top of that, there is a large proportion of people who watch Esports contents due to the motivation of knowledge acquisition, especially for general spectators. Other significant motivations for Esports viewership include drama, escapism and sociality. The next main discovery of this paper refers to the similarities as well as differences of motivations for watching Esports and consuming traditional sports. The thesis observes that Esports spectatorship and traditional sports viewership share many similarities in motivations such as appreciation of skills, rivalry, escapism & entertainment value and drama. However, they differ from each other in terms of knowledge acquisition, level of excitement and vicarious achievement. This research finds that the possible reasons to explain why those disparities happened are the accessibility of Esports which does not require many prerequisites both in physical condition and time & financial cost as traditional sports do. Next, the novelty of video games stretches the limit of competitions that could be perceived by viewers through unlocking more potentials to Esports players, on top of that, video games offer a virtual world that satisfies the fantasy of players, which further increases the level of excitement perceived by Esports viewers. Lastly, different mediums of transmission and dissemination between Esports and traditional sports cause the disparity in vicarious achievements between the two.

Table 6: Conclusion of key findings in this thesis

Similarities in motivations between Esports and traditional sports	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Appreciation of skills2. Rivalry3. Escapism & entertainment value4. Drama
Differences in motivations between Esports and traditional sports	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Knowledge acquisition2. Level of excitement3. Vicarious achievement
Reasons on those differences	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Accessibility of Esports2. Novelty of video game3. Different mediums of transmission and dissemination

Source: Author

The results of this study indicate that Esports spectators do share many similarities with the fandom of traditional sports, but it is also important to aware that there are some unique desires which Esports viewers are looking for in watching the game. This finding might then imply that in one respect, Esports tournament organizers should present the contest in a way that better demonstrates the skills of professional players, in another respect, game developers should attach importance to explore more possibilities in video games while amplifying players' fantasy in order to provide a more splendid watching experience for Esports competitions. Last but not least, media platforms could increase spectators' attachment to Esports by strengthening the exposure of Esports athletes outside the playfield, which deepens the connection between two parties.

Section 2. LIMITATION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Similar to other qualitative research, this study does not encompass a large enough sample size to yield a result which is statistically significant. In addition, it should be realized that the data gathered from interviewees can be subjective, it is inevitable for some individuals believe that certain motivations are more critical to their experience than others. Lastly, there might be not

enough diversity in each category of interviewees, for example, all participants in the category of expert are from Japan, the overlapping nationality may cause a bias regarding to certain questions. Due to these reasons, it might be challenging to apply the findings of this study to a broader context as they do not provide a statistical representation.

The current study employs semi-structured interviews to provide an insight on how the motivations of Esports spectatorship differ from the ones of traditional sports viewership, and what are the possible reasons behind those disparities. Future research could adopt the quantitative approach to test whether the result of this research still stands in a broader population. On top of that, the current study finds that there are notable nuances in motivations between different categories of interviewees. Therefore, future research should account for motives of Esports viewership with the particular group of spectators. Similarly, the paper speculates that such nuances in motivations might also be influenced by different game titles and Esports leagues, which subsequent researchers may want to investigate and clarify for the time to come.

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